

PREFACE

The continental shelf has been a significant part of international law since the famous Truman Proclamation of 1945. It marked the first zone of extended jurisdiction that any State could assert rights over in international law, projecting in some cases far out to sea, well beyond the relatively modest territorial sea of just a few miles. It found quick acceptance in international law, moving from a single State's proclamation to an international convention within 15 years.

While the concept of the continental shelf soon found acceptance, a definition of the continental shelf was more difficult to arrive at, with differing approaches used by the International Law Commission and the 1958 Convention on the Continental Shelf. The definition was ultimately settled with the adoption of Article 76 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provided for a complex multi-part approach guaranteeing sovereign rights over the seabed to a distance of 200 nautical miles in all circumstances, and beyond that distance if certain criteria were met. Interestingly, the Convention created a new body, the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf to consider data States would be obliged to lodge in support of claims to these extended areas.

This portion of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles is the focus of much of Dr Tassin's excellent study. The complications generated by Article 76 have multiplied in the years since 1982 when the Law of the Sea Convention was opened for signature. In 2009, an avalanche of many dozens of submissions were made to the Commission, raising a plethora of issues. Dr Tassin's study is extremely timely as it is the first extensive examination of the extended continental shelf since this surge in interest by States. Dr Tassin considers the perception of the extended continental shelf by States, which will be increasingly relevant given the plethora of conflicting claims made by States in the mad rush of 2009, and the growing interest of States in the resources of the continental shelf in the context of energy security.

LES DEFIS DE L'EXTENSION DU PLATEAU CONTINENTAL

Dr Tassin's study was the product of a cotutelle within the PhD programmes at the University of Melbourne and la Sorbonne. The first of its kind in law between the two institutions required Dr Tassin to write her thesis in French while undertaking a public defence in English. The quality of her work, evident in this study, was also acknowledged by Institut du Droit Economique de la Mer (INDEMER) which awarded her their biennial prize for the best PhD thesis in the French language on the law of the sea.

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